

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about Adopting and Fostering for DHR

QUESTIONS	GENERAL RESPONSE		
	<i>note there may always be variations in these responses, dependent upon unique circumstances of family making the inquiry</i>		
	Applies to Foster Parent and Adoptive Parent	Foster Parent only	Adoptive Parent only
What are the requirements for becoming a ...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Age 19 or older; ▪ Criminal background checks for all household members 19 or older; ▪ Clearance of State Central Registry on Child Abuse/Neglect for all household members 14 or older; ▪ Family Stability; ▪ Statement from physician stating physically able to care for children; ▪ Character references; ▪ Regular source of income that meets your family's financial needs; ▪ Successful completion of a home safety inspection; ▪ Preparation training with home study/family assessment ▪ CPR for adults; infant/children First aid; ▪ If married, must be married at least one (1) year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Age 19 or older; ▪ Criminal background checks for all household members 19 or older; ▪ Clearance of State Central Registry on Child Abuse/Neglect for all household members 14 or older; ▪ Family Stability; ▪ At least one parent must be United States Citizen; ▪ Reasonable good health as verified through completed medical forms; ▪ Character references; ▪ Regular source of income that meets your family's financial needs; ▪ Successful completion of a home safety inspection; ▪ Preparation training with home study/family assessment ▪ CPR for Adults/Infants & Children, First Aid (for Legal Risk Adoption only) ▪ If married, applicants must be married for at least three years. <p>Note: The State Office of Adoption may approve a policy exception to facilitate adoption of a special needs child.</p>

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How much money do I have to make?	There is no minimum income requirement but you are expected to have income to meet your needs as well as the needs of the child/children brought into your home. No foster/adoptive family should be dependent upon board or subsidy payments for their own livelihood.		
Do I have to own my home?	No. However, you do have to have adequate space for a child or children.		
Can I live in a mobile home?	Yes. However, all mobile homes must conform to the National Mobile Home Construction and Safety Act of 1974. An aluminum plate permanently attached to the mobile home will indicate conformity. Mobile homes shall comply with anchoring and tie-down requirements.		
Can I live in an apartment?	Yes. However, the same safety and space requirements apply.		
Is it OK that I have children of my own?	Certainly, but the special needs of each foster or adoptive child will be considered before making placement.		
What if I have something criminal in my background?	There is a detailed list of disqualifying convictions such as any crime against a child, sex crimes, spousal abuse, a crime involving violence - including rape, sexual assault, robbery, burglary, murder or manslaughter, crimes against the elderly or disabled. Any of these convictions SHALL		

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	<p>preclude an individual from being considered to foster or adopt.</p> <p>In addition, there is a list of convictions that MAY preclude an individual from being considered to foster or adopt.</p> <p>Adoption applications shall not be approved when an individual has ANY felony conviction for physical assault, battery, or drug-related offences. Be honest and talk with your social worker about any concerns.</p>		
Can I work with more than one agency.	Individuals or married couples may not be approved to foster or adopt through DHR and another agency at the same time.		
How long does the training take? What if I can't make it? Does my spouse have to attend?	<p>The length of time that the preparation class will take depends on the form of training in which you are participating. "Group Preparation and Selection" (GPS) is the primary means of preparation used by Alabama DHR. GPS is a 30-hour (three hours each week for ten weeks) classroom experience and includes <u>at least</u> two home visits.</p> <p>"Deciding Together" is another method of preparing/assessing a potential foster/adoptive family. It is a one-on-</p>		In addition to the preparation through GPS or Deciding Together, a prospective adoptive couple must each complete a personal autobiography and complete individual interviews with the social worker.

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	<p>one training held with the family and the social worker. There are six workbooks that must be covered in six in-person consultations and this can be a more self-paced program. It also requires the minimum of two in-home family consultations.</p> <p>There may be accommodations for making up missed classes. However, if you miss more than one or two meetings, you may be asked to repeat the process. Both spouses must attend the classes because of the assessment work that is a part of the time spent in class. Remember, class time is just a part of the preparation and approval process.</p>		
Will I be able to specify the age and gender of the child/ children I want to care for?	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Families are given an opportunity to express their child preferences. Not only are age and gender addressed on the child preferences form; but also, families are asked which physical, mental and emotional special needs they feel they can parent.</p> <p>Families for children and youth eight (8) and above, sibling groups of three or more and children with special needs are currently needed the most.</p>		An important item to note: At the present time State of Alabama Adoption Policy prohibits processing an application to adopt normal white children younger than six (6).

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How long does a child stay in the foster home?		Depending on the circumstances, a child may be placed in a foster home for one day or for months. Children are placed in foster care for as long as it takes for them to achieve permanency - whether that is back with their family, relatives or adoption.	Not applicable
Who pays for doctor visits, other health or therapeutic services?		Children in foster care are in the legal custody of the Department of Human Resources. Therefore, it is DHR's responsibility to ensure that medical, educational and emotional needs of the children are met. Most children in foster care have Medicaid which will pay for most medical, dental, counseling and other therapeutic services.	Once an adoption placement agreement is signed, care for the child/children's medical, emotional, mental, other needs become the responsibility of the adoptive family. This is why we look at health insurance and ability to provide for the children's needs in the assessment of potential adoptive families.
Can I adopt a foster child placed in my home?		The primary goal of the foster care system is to reunify a child with his/her family, when possible. In the event that the child cannot return home or be placed with other relatives, foster parents may be given first consideration for adoption. However, the best interest of the child is the primary consideration when deciding on who will adopt the child.	
How long does it take to get your first child?		Most children enter care because of abuse or neglect. You may get a call immediately upon approval as a foster parent or weeks or months later - again, depending upon the county's needs and pool of available foster homes.	The time a family waits for a child to be placed with them for adoption varies. An important thing to keep in mind: The Department of Human Resources primarily completes Special Needs Adoptions. Special Needs

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			Adoption is a service for waiting children first , and then for waiting families. In other words, our role is to find adoptive families for our children, not children for adoptive families.
What it I say "no" to a child they call me about?		<p>Although the county tries to match foster children to a foster home's stated child preferences, emergency situations occur and you may be called about a placement that is not within your comfort level.</p> <p>Ask a lot of questions and say "no" if you are uncomfortable. It is much better to decline than to reluctantly agree only for the placement to disrupt later.</p> <p>DHR needs and appreciates parents who know their limitations.</p>	<p>Prior to deciding to make an offer to place a child with your family, the placement specialists have closely examined the child's history and assessment as well as the assessment of your family. In addition to consulting with other adoption staff at SDHR, they consult with local social worker and/or agency that performed your family's home study. The purpose of these consultations is to complete the assessment as to whether or not your family can meet the needs of the child.</p> <p>When deciding to adopt a child it is important to remember that you are making a lifetime commitment to this child or sib group. Just as with foster care, ask lots of questions know it is okay to say "no" if you are uncomfortable. It is much better to decline a placement than to reluctantly agree only for the adoption to disrupt or dissolve later.</p>

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Can I still work? Is there assistance for childcare?		Many foster parents work so there are provisions available for childcare.	Adoptive families may certainly work outside of the home. Once the adoptive placement agreement is signed, however, the cost of daycare becomes the sole responsibility of the adoptive family. Any assistance available while the child was in the Department's custody will no longer be available.
Do I have to foster before I can adopt?	No you do not have to foster before adopting. Many families come to our agency wanting to be considered for adoption only. It is important to know exactly what you are capable of doing. Be sure to make it clear to the social worker doing your preparation & assessment (home study) what you are interested in. If you are interested in adoption-only or dual approval, your study must be sent to SDHR for approval.		
What will my interaction be with the child's birth family?		The primary goal is to reunify children with their birth families. DHR policy requires that children in foster care have regular, meaningful contact with their family. This contact includes telephone calls as well as in-person visits.	There are some children who will need, to some degree, continued contact with members of their birth family even after they are adopted. The arrangements for level of contact should be agreed upon prior to agreeing to the adoptive placement.

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		<p>The ISP team develops the plan for telephone calls and visitations. Foster Parents are expected to be supportive of this contact. However, you will not be required to provide your home address or telephone number to birth family.</p> <p>Your personal comfort level affects the amount and type of contact you have with birth family. However, it is important to remember that the primary goal of the foster care system is to reunify children with their birth family. Visitation, phone and mail contact are all essential steps in the reunification process. Foster parents should be accepting and willing to support children having contact with their birth family.</p>	
How long do I have to take off from work following the adoption?		Not applicable	Post-placement bonding and childcare arrangements will be assessed based on the needs of the child.
How much does it cost?		Assessment of a family's capacity to meet their own financial needs is a part of the home study process. The family will incur costs of medical examinations. Additionally, there may be time prior to receipt of board payment when the foster family will have to spend their	DHR charges no fees to parents to adopt a child from us. Fees are usual and customary for legal and court costs. These fees are assessed by the court and/or attorney. Costs for medical examinations are also incurred by the family.

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		money to meet the needs of the child. Families should not be dependent upon the foster care payment to meet their own needs or financial obligations.	
What is the maximum age one can be to adopt?		Not applicable	There is no maximum age; however, the needs of the child will be considered in relation to the prospective adoptive parent(s) age. Contingency plans in the event the adoptive parent(s) becomes disabled or deceased are reviewed for all families.
Can I find out more information about a child I want to adopt?		Not applicable	<p>A variety of Federal, State and agency statutes/policies regulate how much and what information may be shared about a child, unless there is a "need to know" relationship established. This protects the confidentiality and privacy of the children in our custody.</p> <p>If a potential adoptive family has an interest in learning more about a specific child or sibling group they have seen in our recruitment material, they should ask their social worker to MAIL a copy of their current, approved home study to the Office of Adoption.</p> <p>If the adoptive family is approved by a County DHR (in Alabama), their home study should already be at the State Office. Their local DHR social worker would need to notify Office of</p>

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			<p>Adoption Intake of the family's interest in a particular child or sibling group.</p> <p>The study will be routed to the placement staff assigned to the child in question. After review of the study, should the placement staff think the family might be a good match, they will make contact with the family's social worker to share additional details about the child or sibling group.</p>
Can I use the home study from my private agency to adopt a child from foster care?			<p>Studies from private agencies are certainly considered, providing the agency is licensed to provide adoption services.</p> <p>It is important to remember that the children in the foster care system have usually been victims of varying degrees of abuse and neglect. Their circumstances oftentimes lead to very specific needs. For this reason, we look closely at the study to see if the family has successfully completed preparation training possess the skills necessary to meet the children's needs. We may require that a family successfully complete such training prior to placing a child with them for adoption?</p>

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Can the child be from a different cultural background than my own?	Yes if the foster/adoptive parent is willing and able to parent children of different races/cultures. Federal Law prohibits using race or national origin as the single or exclusive criterion in the placement of children.	Foster parents are expected to respect and help continue to nurture a child's cultural, religious and other differences, especially when reunification with family is the permanency goal for the child.	Adoptive parents are expected to respect and help continue to nurture a child's cultural identify if different from their own.
Can the birth family come back and get my adopted child?		Not applicable.	Although DHR does some legal risk adoptions, most of the children placed for adoption by our agency are legally free for adoption. This means that the courts have terminated parents' legal rights.
Why aren't infants typically available for adoption from DHR?			Typically, when parents relinquish their rights on newborns or infants, they make their own plan for the child. The children that DHR has available for adoption generally come through the foster care system because of abuse and/or neglect. When infants and young children are in the system and become available for adoption they may be a part of a sibling group of older brothers & sisters who must be placed together.
What if I find a child from another state that I want to adopt?		Not applicable.	If you are a DHR- approved adoptive family residing in Alabama , DHR does ask that you give the Department time to determine whether or not you may be a good resource for waiting Alabama child/children prior to searching out of the state. If you do locate a child in the custody of another state's child

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			welfare agency, you should ask that state to send a written request to the State Office of Adoption, for a courtesy copy of the approved home study. Of course, the Office of Adoption will also need written permission from the potential adoptive family to release the study. There is a \$300 fee for each request to send a study to an out-of-state private agency. There is no fee for studies sent to other State Child Welfare Agencies.
What is the process when I am selected as a possible match for a child that is available for adoption?			<p>If a placement specialist assigned to a child or sibling group determines that your family would be a good match for a child in their caseload, they will make contact with your social worker to share additional information about the child/children.</p> <p>Your county (or agency) social worker is your liaison to our State Office of Adoption. And will be your primary contact at this point. At the point that the placement specialist thinks that placement might be appropriate, they convene the State Office staffing Team (which is made up of other adoption professionals). The Team reviews information about the child and your family and determines if the placement specialist should proceed.</p>

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			<p>The placement specialist then schedules a State/County staffing team (which is made up of your social worker, the county worker for the foster child as well as staff from the State DHR Office of Adoption. If all parties agree that your family is a good resource for the child or sibling group, an offer is made and opportunities for you to meet the child/children are scheduled.</p> <p>If all agree then pre-placement visits and then ultimately paperwork and the legal process are completed.</p>

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